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ABSTRACT

The multicultural and bilingual population of California will continue to increase over the next decades, and as a result, the role of multicultural and bilingual education will increase in importance. Since the 1970s improvements have occurred in instructional materials, in program evaluation, and in teacher certification to meet the needs of California's bilingual population, but the point has not yet been reached where such changes have been wholly accepted and institutionalized. Bilingual training has been viewed as a facilitative mechanism, not as something central to the overall preparation or basic mission of teachers. Education must beginned to be viewed from the perspective of the learner, regardless of his or her language or race, and include native language and culture as the first focal point of education. The cultural and historical lessons of education will include more than those provided by Protestant America and school will concentrate on a good basic education for all, built upon a notion of a common and shared human background. The emphasis on training educational personnel in cultural diversity must be continued and expanded; more teachers from more different ethnic backgrounds must be recruited; and teacher training should be solid and stress general education, subject matter concentration, professional pedagogical preparation, and field experience at the classroom level to be taught. Finally, fundamental changes are needed at the level of State education policy to ensure more recognition of cultural diversity and more attention to the limited English speaking student. (KH)

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# BILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

**Peter L. LoPresti**

While it is clear from the continuing debates in California and elsewhere across America that not all of our policy-makers have accepted the important role of multicultural and bilingual education, it is equally clear that it is a role destined to become more central and more important in American schools as the years pass. Current examinations of enrollment patterns in California schools indicate that during the 1980s those students previously labeled as minority in the schools will become the majority, and far more than half of that emerging majority will reach the schools as limited-English-speaking students. Such patterns in California will be repeated increasingly in other states. These number suggest that there can be no doubt that the multicultural and bilingual population of the United States will play a stronger and more pronounced role in our schools. It seems equally clear, from my perspective, that American thinking must expand well beyond current concepts of multicultural and bilingual education if we are to meet this challenge.

My interest in this question is not rhetorical; it is not casual. I come to the question from both a personal as well as an educational perspective. The terms limited-English-speaking and non-English-speaking are relatively new to the language of education, but for me they bear a special meaning. I came to this country as a non-English-speaking child. I passed through the limited-English-speaking phase in the early elementary school years in New Haven, Connecticut, and I suffered because of that background. I came to America as an eight-year-old immigrant from Sicily, and I lived daily with the absence of sympathy for the plight of a child who did not speak English in our nation's English-speaking schools.

There was no bilingual education in the schools of New Haven forty years ago. There was no special consideration given to limited-English-speaking children, let alone any notion of those concepts which are today common. The teachers were self-righteously American, and their mission, when faced with a non-native child such as myself, was to make me into an American, post haste. More often than not, this was a painful process, nor was it always a successful process. But in my case, I had the strongest possible support from my family, as well as other kinds of positive reinforcement. Thus, I proceeded through the educational hurdles that can so easily work against the child with a foreign language background.

I can therefore ask questions in English about the kind of child I was -- the limited-English-speaking child who comes to school whole, eager to give of oneself, eager to learn,

eager to explore the world, and indeed, well aware that there is much to learn about the language and culture of this immense American nation. The schools of New Haven, those forty years ago, did not seek to exploit or utilize the personal and cultural treasures I brought with me from my Sicilian background. Instead, I was seen as deprived, strange, even stupid. I was to be molded in someone else's image.

Let me take stock of how far we have come in bilingual education. From my New Haven perspective, we have come a long way. In the decade of the 1970s there has come a recognition of the needs and the rights of limited-English-speaking children. We have seen legislation which creates programs for this population, and we have seen funding in support of those programs from both the state and federal levels. We have also seen special requirements for teaching credentials to ensure competent instruction in those bilingual programs.

These represent major steps forward. Yet, I believe we must also recognize that the limited-English-speaking population and the bilingual education programs serving them continue to be viewed as an appendage to the schools by far too many people. Given the language and cultural differences, these children are looked at as non-mainstream, as a group that must be changed if they are to be successfully educated. The bilingual programs are seen as an offshoot, rather than as a major part of the educational program for the dominant culture.

While we have seen changes in curriculum, in instructional materials, in program evaluation, and in teacher certification to meet the bilingual population of our California schools, we are certainly not yet at a point where such changes have been wholly accepted and institutionalized. The atmosphere continues to be politically charged, and those who defend as well as in Congress and in the national administration. It is interesting to consider the nature of the political argument against efforts to effectively educate the limited-English-speaking pupils. People seem not to understand the dynamics involved. They seem not to grasp the fact that no nation is frozen in the legends and traditions of its past. Given the population patterns of California schools today the terms minority and foreign are little more than ironic.

We must move beyond such political squabbling and come to realize that multiculturalism and bilingualism are the true character of today's public schools, particularly here in California. This realization must center upon the fact that all of the children involved are Americans. They are the future of our American nation, and they will determine the course of our continually changing American culture. It is through the growth and struggle, the successes and failures of each generation, that a nation remains vibrant and retains faith in the future.

Traditionally in this nation we have conceived of the preparation of school personnel as the training of teachers to teach a school population fluent in English, and within that broad context to favor certain preferred dialects of English. As the population in our schools came to reflect certain minority populations, we altered our educational practice to provide requirements that prospective teachers understand and receive some training in crosscultural settings.

Then in the 1970s we modified our approaches further to focus minimally on skills to prepare teachers for bilingual situations, and such notions gave birth to the current bilingual-emphasis credential programs, bilingual specialist credential programs, and bilingual certificate or competence assessment system which we have in California. These appear to be major breakthroughs in teacher preparation when viewed in comparison to the experiences of my childhood, but the dominant view remains that these are simply specialized avenues for dealing with different and non-mainstream students.

All of the teachers of which we are speaking have, after all, been trained in essentially

traditional ways -- for teaching, for nurturing, for assisting a school population which is expected ultimately to function in English, and indeed, in certain preferred dialects of English. There are additional expectations that our school population will continue to reflect dominant American culture, specifically the Judeo-Christian patterns manifested in traditional American Protestantism. The training which has been given our teachers to assist them in dealing with the bilingual population has been viewed as a facilitative mechanism, not as something central to their overall preparation or their basic mission as teachers.

This assertion is not made to question the motives or sincerity of teachers who have sought and earned bilingual credentials. It is likely that most, if not all, have done so through a commitment to assist our bilingual population, and in many cases this commitment will go well beyond the limitations of the system which I am describing. I believe that the same applies to those engaged in training bilingual teachers in our institutions of higher education. That too is a role of commitment, but again circumscribed by the limitations of our traditional educational system and its basic assumptions.

The suggestion here is that our educational and political structure has not faced fully the realities and the future needs of our multi-lingual, multi- cultural society. As yet, the state has not recognized such needs and therefore not made the fundamental educational changes which should come by the end of this new decade. In a relatively obscure document entitled, "A Rationale for Bilingual-Bicultural Education", prepared by the Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing of the State of California in the early 1970s, one finds the following statement:

> "The decision to mandate instruction in one's native language is one of logic and practicality. The school environment is a verbal one. How logical to instruct the learner in a language that permits response and interaction on his part. How practical to make use of one's strengths in trying to eliminate his weaknesses. Using the native language as a foundation for literacy instills confidence in the ability to achieve and minimizes the possibilities of frustration associated with the duality of language/content mastery. Many opportunities present themselves for making cultural differences an invaluable tool in teaching mutual appreciation, and in setting the stage for pupils to function effectively in the multi-cultural world they face outside of the school environment."

This remains a defensible statement today, over ten years later. But it does not go far enough.

If one looks at the specialist and services credential areas in which we prepare school personnel in California, such as special education, reading, early childhood education, school administration, pupil personnel services, and others, one finds no provisions that ensure attention to limited-English-speaking children. Some initial steps are being taken in these directions. There is consideration and exploration of the potential intersections between special education, early childhood education, and bilingual education. But these are just beginnings; on the whole our system has continued to view the education of limited-English-speaking students as peripheral to the overall school situation.

Despite such drawbacks and limitations, it is fair to describe what has occurred in the 1970s in bilingual education as a success story. Rapid movement has been made in this last decade to meet bilingual needs with new programs, new funding, and new credentialing. Viewed from the emerging perspective of the 1980s, such efforts will appear but embryonic. Yet is has been a success story. Together we became aware of the challenge, moved in a stop-gap and ad hoc fashion to meet that challenge, and now have a strong base for meeting the needs of the future.

Thus standing firmly on the accomplishments of the 1970s, we are determined to proceed into the 1980s and beyond. To that end, let us pose the question: How shall we educate limited-English-speaking pupils? Can we not rely on some basic principles of education which apply to any pupil? We begin with the child, with its culture and values, the strengths and weaknesses, and the promise which it brings to school. We view things from the perspective of the learner, whether that learner be Anglo, Black, or from any of the many limited-English communities of this state and nation.

We proceed from the known to the unknown. The tradition of social studies education in our American schools has been, for over one hundred years, to teach first about the self, then the family, then the neighborhood, then the community, and gradually on through the city, the county, the state, the nation, and on to the world. Why should we be applying any different principles now, simply because our society is more diverse? Starting with the individual child, the family, and the community, we must include the native language and culture as the first focal point of education.

Let us move from this basic principle to a broader question of philosophy. What aspirations do our limited-English-speaking pupils have for themselves? What aspirations do we have for them? While these may be questions for the educational philosopher, let's hazard some answers. If we make the usual assumptions that are traditional in American society, we would alienate the limited-English-speaking pupils. We should, consistent with the principles discussed before, carve out of the realities of the lives of the children coming into our schools today, and the home culture, however divergent, a new and fresh focus for discovering and discussing the past and present of this nation.

We will continue to use history, but it will be a broader history than that traditionally taught in our schools. We will find examples and models for our children, but we will draw them from a more total history of the human race, not just Protestant America. We will use, specifically, the history of the American Southwest, the history of the Hispanic peoples, the history of the Far East and its peoples who have come to this nation.

This is not a new educational procedure. It has been done before as our nation absorbed settlers from all of the European nations, and it has been done in recent decades as the role of the American Black in American history has been recognized, however many generations late.

It is time, however, to make these adjustments in a wholesale fashion, not simply as educational/political reactions to the most recent petitioner. The result can only be positive, as we struggle to exist effectively in a world grown smaller and smaller, more volatile and potentially self-destructive each year. History, and all other subjects that touch directly on the human race, can and must be developed and presented in a manner that will make all children feel welcome and at home.

This does not require any distortion. There is no need for false history, exaggeration, or the use of history as a palliative. Distortion miseducates everyone. What all deserve, however, is an accurate and full accounting of the world as it has taken shape for all people of all languages and races. This is not only of service to the minority and non-native pupils, but perhaps even more so to the traditionally but now less dominant Anglo majority, which must also understand the broader view of a changing and often threatening world.

Schools will concentrate on a good basic education for all, built upon this common and shared human background. Working from the language, culture and innate abilities which each child brings to school, we will provide the English language skills, the computation skills, and the survival skills which will reinforce individual confidence and a sense of well-being and competence. An awareness and appreciation of the multiple heritages of this state and nation

will be a basic part of this education. Without such awareness and appreciation none of us can function effectively in the United States, and the world, of today and the future.

It is not reasonable or possible to expect that all of our teachers will have the same cultural framework to bring to the classroom. Nor would it be desirable. We are not a homogeneous society, and we cannot expect a homogeneous teaching force. On the other hand, it is reasonable and indeed, crucial that all of our teachers be able to make the same cultural assumptions as the students with whom they work.

In California we have for over ten years now required that all teachers, during their training, receive instruction that will generate awareness of cultural diversity, and that their student teaching placements provide familiarity with and experience in school settings different from their own educational and neighborhood experiences. This emphasis in our training of educational personnel must be continued, and even expanded.

In addition, more teachers from the ethnic backgrounds of our limited-English-speaking children must be recruited. The huge gap between the growing number of such pupils and the low percentage of certificated staff from those backgrounds must be closed. This is important on two score. First, the identification between learner and teacher is always strong, and the communication which is so important to a successful educational linkage will be deeper when limited-English-speaking students are taught in at least some of their school years by teachers who have similar cultural and educational experiences as their own. Second, teachers and other school personnel from the ethnic backgrounds of the limited--English-speaking students will provide obvious role models, and can by example, help students raise their aspirations for high achievement and self-fulfillment. In addition, a further case can be made for the value of contact with such adults by the Anglo children, in preparation for life in the multi-lingual and multi-cultural society in which we all live.

The preparation of such new teachers must be sound. We are not looking for token individuals. Teacher preparation institutions must accept an obligation for affirmative recruiting of candidates, must take limited-English-speaking background into consideration in the preparation process, and must build upon those strengths and assist potential teachers in overcoming whatever weaknesses exist in their formal education.

The ultimate program of teacher preparation for all candidates must stress general education, subject matter concentration, professional pedagogical preparation, and field experience at the classroom level to be taught. High standards must be expected of all who wish to work in the increasingly complex public schools of our state and nation.

Some changes must occur in the preparation of all educational personnel if we wish to stay in tune with our changing society. A strong background in the social sciences, particularly cultural anthropology, linguistics, and the study and use of history will be of increasing importance to <u>all</u> teachers. It is hard to imagine any teacher working effectively in our diverse culture settings without such understandings. The field of communications, including the study of English, other languages, dialectal patterns, language development, and the relationships between language and culture, and between a language and its diverse speakers, will also be critical.

America remains, and will apparently continue to intensify as a technological society. A continued concentration on science and mathematics, and the application of such, is thus also a necessary part of teacher preparation. All students, including our limited-English-speaking pupils, should be guided to make the best use of skills and abilities which will place them in tune with the accelerating technical complexity of our society.

Study in foreign language for all must be stressed, particularly so when so many languages

are no longer truly foreign in this country. It must be recognized that not only is international insight gained by language study, but also a growing application in such fields as teaching, commerce, and public service here in California and across our own nation. There is, quite clearly, a growing sentiment that all California teachers should have a background of study and facility in at least one of the languages of the dominant limited-English-speaking groups in the state, and a similar expectation may rise in other states as bilingual education expands its horizons.

While we consider this general education background for all new educational personnel, we must also stress the problem-solving abilities that come from the social sciences and natural sciences, and the cultural insights to be gained from the humanities and language study. In addition to these basic qualifications for school personnel, it is also clear that we will continue to need, in expanding numbers, specialists in language skills and cultural understanding of the many diverse groups of children in our schools, including the limited - English - speaking populations.

The professional preparation required for today's schools must be both heavily theory-oriented as well as field-based. Grounding in educational philosophy, psychology, and methodology must be melded with work in communities and schools, all reflecting the increasingly diverse populations to be served.

Such directions, quite obviously, would make the current bilingual emphasis authorization now available with the teaching credential in California a requirement for all rather than an option for some, along with strengthened preparation in general education. A review of the directions and trends in California's school population, and similar patterns in many other states, provides strong support for this type of professional preparation.

Such an orientation towards diverse cultural and linguistic patterns in our society should also be reflected in the requirements for all other professional credential programs, which are offered at the specialist and services level in California. All school personnel -- the administrator, the counselor, the special education teachers, etc. -- must have these same broad skills and understandings.

Indeed, given the stable teaching force in many of our school districts in California and across the nation, and public service here in California and across our own nation, it is also appropriate to call for this type of updated training at the staff development level. There are efforts underway throughout California to provide staff development assistance to teachers who wish to qualify for the bilingual certificate of competence, and thereby gain authorization to teach in bilingual classrooms.

While such efforts must be applauded, I am inclined to call for a far more pervasive approach. I would hope that all members of the educational profession in California, through cooperative efforts among employing school districts, professional organizations, and colleges and universities, could be involved in ongoing staff development activities with a focus on cultural and linguistic study which would assure our educational system's ability to meet these new challenges.

If we can accomplish such a wholesale conversion of our educational system, and all of its personnel, in this new decade, we will have made a major and appropriate response to the needs of our society. We will have created a system in which no student or teacher is a stranger. There would be no protagonists or antagonists. We would no longer have one group trying to make Americans of the other, for all would recognize that Americans come in a variety of packages, none better than another. There would be a oneness of purpose between learners and teachers, and indeed everyone would more correctly be both learner and teacher.

If we move boldly our schools and once again become centers of learning and community activity, not for a single traditional American notion of community, but reflective of the many forms of community which now make up our greater national heritage. Home and school would then, as was once the case, be united in purpose -- to jointly launch each of our youngsters into a new era, with pride in the past, strengths in the present, and confidence in the future.

I believe that all American educators can, indeed must, engage in the discussions, make the decisions, build the curricula, and create the circumstances -- in cooperation with civic, political, and cultural leaders -- to make this educational scenario come true. =

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